
Open Letter to Jacob S. Coxey: Excerpts Read at Fountain Grove, Lake View, IL — Aug. 25, 1895

by Eugene V. Debs

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Jacob S. Coxey of Commonweal fame spoke yesterday [Aug. 25, 1895] at Fountain Grove in Lake View. Eugene V. Debs was present by proxy of a vehement letter written in Woodstock jail.

Fountain Grove is in the agricultural districts of Chicago. It is reached by going as far as possible on the streetcar lines, walking a mile though cabbage patches and a bean yard, and between two chicken coops. These disadvantages prevented a large crowd from assembling to hear the “General,” but those who were there — single-taxers, socialists, People’s Party men, and all — were highly enthusiastic.

After Mr. Coxey had finished his discourse the letter from Eugene V. Debs was read and lustily cheered.

Eugene V. Debs’ Letter.

The characteristics parts of Mr. Debs’ communication follow:

In surveying the field of politics corruption is seen on every hand and as a result there has gone forth a resounding call for reform. To anticipate any change whatever from either of the old parties is the culmination of political idiocy. They differ only in name. Their policy is in every important proposition essentially the same. Both are dominated by the money power, and both are equally debauched by its influence.

The present administration is probably the most infamous that has ever cursed the country.¹ It is a moral and political mal-

¹ Debs refers to the Democratic administration of Grover Cleveland.

formation. From the vilest deputy marshal with a club and a gun to the Buzzards Bay partner of the Rothschilds,² it is one blended mass of indescribable political villainy. The people have repudiated it by a storm of scorn, which finds adequate expression only in the term "cyclone." The Democratic Party, incapable and corrupt, full of false professions, detested and scorned throughout the land, is as dead as a mummy and embalmed in its own slime. There is no resurrection for it unless the people after all should decide that it is better than the Republican Party.

In one regard it may be said that the Republican Party, steeped to its eyes in infamy, is superior to the Democratic Party, because it does not hesitate to boldly champion every measure calculated to enlarge the power of plutocrats, while the Democratic Party makes profession of loyalty to the people, to which it turns traitor in the supreme hour of trial.

Salvation in the People's Party.

In this supreme emergency what is the rational course to be pursued by men who would purify the government and once more have a government of the people? There is but one answer: It is to come out boldly for the People's Party to rally under its banner and support its candidates at the polls. There is absolutely no hope of reform that does not center in the supremacy of the People's Party.

It is impossible to either cleanse or deodorize the two old parties. They constitute the Augean stables in which is accumulated an amount of filth and corruption in the presence of which exaggeration is impossible. The corporations debauch the courts, and the courts respond by declaring statutes designed to make them contribute to the support of the government from their stolen wealth unconstitutional.³ The corporations appeal to the courts for injunctions that they may the better enslave working-men and at once they spread out over the land, and thousands of moral deformities from the slums, with clubs and guns, swarm the highways to do the bidding of judicial tsars. The corporations appeal to Grover Cleveland, a trained hangman, whose statesmanship is symbolized by a halter, a shotgun, and a fish-hook,

² Grover Cleveland maintained a "Summer White House" at Agawam Point in the Buzzards Bay community of Bourne, Massachusetts, located on Cape Cod.

³ In 1895 in the case of *Pollock v. Farmer's Loan & Trust Company*, the Supreme Court of the United States found in a 5-4 decision that the income tax on interest, dividends, and rents which was part of the 1894 Income Tax Act was unconstitutional. This decision would not be made moot until the adoption of the 16th Amendment of the Constitution in 1913.

and sudden as lightening from a storm cloud the army comes with shotted guns to shoot workingmen with as little concern as if they were savages away from their reservations. The corporations appeal to a pliant judge, whose robes are as spotted as leopard's hide, for a decision to send innocent men to prison without a trial, and promptly prison doors swing open to receive the victims of despotic power.

These haggard truths, sounding the death knell of liberty, demand of the people an unconquerable determination to place a party in power pledge to sweeping reforms, and there is but one party upon which the people can center their hopes, and that is the People's Party.

It would afford me immense satisfaction to be present at the gathering in Lake View, but Tsar Woods, in the interest of corporations and in defiance of my constitutional rights, has deprived me of my liberty, and I must remain a prisoner until my sentence expire. In the meantime, as I have opportunity, I shall not fail to voice my convictions that the hoped-for reforms must come through the supremacy of the People's Party.

To Talk Until Tired Out.

The "picnic," as it was advertised, was under the auspices of the North Town branch of the People's Party, and W.J. Danford presided as chairman, with P.J. Grimes as secretary. When Gen. Coxey began his speech the crowd which had gathered under the trees cheered lustily — even after he had made the statement that he intended to speak until he was tired. This he proceeded to do, the address lasting about two hours and a half. In the course of it he advocated his favorite doctrine of non-interest-bearing bonds and good roads. He has become a much more vigorous and effective speaker than he was during the memorable march to Washington, being not only forceful in his arguments, but having a fund of humorous stories, which he tells with much spirit and to the vast delight of his hearers.

Asked Many Questions.

At the close of the speech the audience showed its interest in the subject by asking numerous question, which he answered with great promptness. When at last he came down from the platform he went to the carriage where Mrs. Coxey sat — she attends him on his trip — and slid into an old drab overcoat, which he buttoned to his chin.

Then he remarked that he firmly expected to be chosen Governor of Ohio at the coming election, and, furthermore, that he would take the nomination of the People's Party for the Presidency next year if it was offered to him — and he was quite sure that it would be. He admitted that his recent trip through the West was made with a view to the time when he might, as a candidate for the highest office in the nation, want to ask people for their votes. He intends to make a similar expedition through the South and West after the Ohio campaign.

Edited with footnotes by Tim Davenport

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